



Examining Mula Jadi Na Bolon in the Traditional Belief of Toba Batak People

Pintor Marihot Sitanggang

Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) Pematang Siantar
pintorsitanggang76@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34307/b.v6i2.494>

Abstract: *This article describes the traditional Batak's belief in the era of pre-Christian mission to the Batak people in North Sumatera, Indonesia. The traditional Batak's belief the mythology of Mula Jadi Na Bolon, was believed as ultimate and absolute power, the creator of the world and everything inside the world. The Batak people worshiped Mula Jadi Na Bolon, offered offering and had ritual worshipping Mula Jadi Na Bolon. They called Mula Jadi Na Bolon as Debata, then this the word that I.L. Nommensen used to translate God as Debata in Batak's language. When the Christian Missionaries arrived among the Toba Batak people, they found the Toba Batak people to be a devoutly zealous people with the vivid awareness of religious power in the world around the Toba Batak people. While many of these religious notions were condemned by missionaries, Batak piety toward the dynamic activity of religious power was preserved in a Christian context. By using the qualitative research method, this article describes the theological approach acknowledging the traditional Batak's belief in Mula Jadi Na Bolon as High God. This article explores the Christian Mission approaching to the Batak people, how the missionary used the inculturation in Christian Mission's method to approach the Batak people. This research describes how the Batak people shifted from the traditional belief to the Christian teaching.*

Keywords: *Mula Jadi Na Bolon, Batak people, Mythology, Christian, Mission.*

Article History: Received: 15-05-2023 Revised: 01-12-2023 Accepted: 02-12-2023

1. Introduction

Toba Batak people are found around Lake Toba in North Sumatera, Indonesia. It is ethnically diverse, with syncretisms acknowledged, liable to change, and linked with village organizations and the monotheistic Indonesian culture. Myths and rituals focus on rice cultivation and the local kinship system. These two spheres were integrated into a cosmological order represented in religious art forms, dance, oratory, and gift-giving ceremonies. In the history of the Batak's myth, Batak people believe the creator to be *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*, who was called the lord of the universe. *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is good and evil, male and female. More specifically, Batak people believe that complementary opposites such as life and death, humans and animals, masculinity and femininity, village and forest, warfare and farming, metal and cloth, permeate the religion and commonly occur in their traditional belief. In their traditional belief, the rituals to *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* existed and



impacted the culture and customary law of the Toba Batak people. This reality was understood and realized by the Christian missionary especially Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen in order to establish mission works to the Toba Batak people. Contextual mission methods became golden way to plan and ground the Christian teachings to the Toba Batak people. Such as: translation method, customary law approach, and indigenious people approach. As the result of mission works mostly the Toba Batak people accepted the Christian teaching and shifted their belief from *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* to God in the way of Christian belief, but they strongly keep their culture. Keep in mind, Christianity not to replace or erase the culture of indigenious people but to bring the culture in the light of Word of God.

2. Method of Research

By using the qualitative research method in this article, I want to explore the theological approach especially the mission method by acknowledging the traditional Batak's belief in *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* as High God. Then, I will move to the Christian Mission approaching to the Batak people and made the Batak people shifted their belief. Studying on the history of Christianity in Indonesia specifically to the Batak people, the missionary used the inculturation in Christian Mission's method to approach the Batak people in North Sumatera Indonesia. The missionaries established the Christianity by using the inculturation and indigenosity in order to teach Christianity to the Batak people. This article started with examining the traditional belief Batak people in *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* as the High God and explored the ritus of the Toba Batak people in their traditional belief. This research continued with studying the Christian Mission methods that was established by Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen in order to approach the Toba Batak people. This article described how the missionary planted and grounded the Christian teachings to the Toba Batak people by using the contextualization methods of mission. Before conclusion this article examined the interaction between Christian mission and teaching with the culture of the Toba Batak people. The question will be, did the ritual or cult of the traditional belief became obstacle to the Christian mission or can be golden ways to teach Christian teaching. By examining the traditional belief of the Toba Batak people to *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* this research explored and described that culture and what inside the culture such as language, customary law became tools to contextualize the Christian teaching. This article described that Jesus or Christian teaching not to replace or erase the culture.

3. Result and Discussion

Traditional belief of Batak people in *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* as High God

***Mula Jadi Na Bolon* as High God of the Batak People**

The basic point to understand *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is that Batak people believe and understand and describe it as the Creator. The fact is that *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* exists all over

the world, and the Batak people described it as the High God. Anicetus B. Sinaga describes the terminology of *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* saying “*Mulajadi* is the composition of the words *mula* and *jadi*. *Mula* means ‘beginning’ and *jadi* means ‘to become’. The combination words mean ‘the beginning of becoming’ or ‘the beginning of genesis’. *Bolon* means ‘great’. Under this name *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is presented as the Creator.”¹ From this terminology I try to analyze that in traditional Batak’s belief creation is begun in time and this is contrasted with the eternal beginning of the High God. The High God is considered as the Beginner and not merely as the beginning. *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is conceived as the “cause” of genesis which actively began the creation. Therefore, the Batak people propose to call *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* “the great Beginner of Genesis”. Sinaga describes that “*Mula Jadi Na Bolon* created [*manjadihon*] all that exists, and all beings have their beginnings from him. *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is able to create [*tarjadihonsa* = a capacity form of *manjadihon*] everything he wants to call into existence merely through his words.”² From this understanding we can see how close the understanding of *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* in traditional Batak’s belief to Christian belief in God as Creator. *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* that was believed as the High God in the traditional belief of the Toba Batak people has similar or relevant meaning with God in Christian teaching that also was believed as Creator the world and everything inside the world or all creation. Based on this reality, empowered the missionary to establish the mission methods to bridge this similarity meaning and run the contextual mission works.

Paul B. Pedersen describes that “Traditional Batak cosmology divided existence into three levels world. The upper world was the realm of the High God, *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*, and the spirits of departed ancestors. The middle world was the arena of human activity; and the under world was the home of ghosts and demons, ruled by Naga Padoha the serpent.”³ Batak people experienced all cosmic space as a totality of under world, upper world, and middle world in which each layer had a special function in the harmony of existence. Disruption of the harmony would mean the annihilation of the whole cosmos. Pederson suggests that, “Batak mythology described a tree of life, reaching from the under world to the upper world, symbolic of the High God in uniting all existence and representing the totality of cosmic order.”⁴

Philips O. Lumbantobing explores that,
In Batak’s belief High God called *Ompui Mula Jadi Na Bolon*, or in short *Debata*. This god exists in the three parts of the world. As the god of the upper world, he is not only called *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* but also as *Tuan Bubi Na Bolon*; as the god of middle-world he also called as *Ompu Silaon Na Bolon*;

¹ Anicetus B. Sinaga, *The Toba-Batak High God; Transcendence and Immanence* (West Germany: Anthropos Institute, 1981), 48.

² Anicetus B. Sinaga, *The Toba-Batak High God*, 50.

³ Paul B. Pedersen, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul; The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 20.

⁴ Paul B. Pedersen, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul; The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra*, 21.

as the god of under-world, he also called as *Tuan Pane na Bolon*.⁵

Further in his closer examination on *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* Lumbantobing describes, *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* appears as *Tuan Bubi Na Bolon* is the ruler of the upper-world and that he is also the upper-world itself, as *Silaon Na Bolon* is the ruler and the totality of the whole community and of the middle-world and that *Pane Na Bolon* is that of the under-world, the sea and lightning. This implies that *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is the total cosmos, he is omnipresent and his power is evident in everything. As *Pane Na Bolon*, the under-world serpent, he sends the rain, creates the waves and determines in how far the months, the days and moments shall be favorable or unfavorable.⁶

Sinaga proposes that “another characterization of *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is as judge. He is conceived as a totally judge who impartially administers his law and rules without favoring anybody.”⁷ Pedersen suggests that “the whole personal and social life of the Batak was permeated with religious meaning, guided by religious motives, and dominated by supernatural concepts through the gods, ancestors, and dynamic cosmos in which he lived. In his personal and social life the religious element was basic to all practices and activities.”⁸ From this reality we can that in the traditional Batak’s belief that *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* gave the *Adat* as customary law which guides Batak society in the practical order.

***Mula Jadi Na Bolon* in the Traditional Cult of Batak people**

Examining *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* in the traditional belief of the Toba Batak people including the ritual inside the belief proved that the form of worship already inside the ritual. The concept of prayer, offering and also the leader of ritual proved the value and the life of ritual. This article proved that the seed of the religion already inside the traditional belief or inside the culture. This reality pushed the missionary to establish the contextual mission methods to approach the local people especially the Toba Batak people.

The traditional Batak’s belief formulated a special ritual to *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* as High God and was believed as the creator. Sinaga formulates the ritual:

Ompu, Mula Jadi Na Bolon, The Beginner of all exists
Who has created the upper-world and the middle world
together with everything in them.
Who has no beginning, who has come from the non-beginning
Who has no origin, and Whose end is unknown
Look and gaze, *Ompu*
Be attentive, stoop from the heaven of heavens,
From the height of heights, and hear the words of my prayer
You, *Ompu*, who enjoys being the Beginner,

⁵ Philip O. Lumbantobing, *The Structure of The Toba-Batak Belief in The High God* (Amsterdam: Jacob Van Campen Press, 1963), 3.

⁶ Philip O. Lumbantobing, *The Structure of The Toba-Batak Belief in The High God*, 35.

⁷ Anicetus B. Sinaga, *The Toba-Batak High God*, 58.

⁸ Paul B. Pedersen, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul; The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra*, 23.

You are the most notable consellor,
You drip rain and the warmth of the day,
May fortunate sons be born like the sun, and
Honorable daughters who are notable of council.
You are the Beginner of well-being for us human beings,
May the *Baringin*-tree have hanging roots, the *jabijabi*-tree have roots;
May we be numerous in number, supported by *Mulajadi* ⁹

In this ritual we find there is an important object in traditional Batak's belief named *Baringin*-tree. *Baringin*-tree is the highest tree in the Batak Island. Sinaga describes that "in taking the *Baringin*-tree as a symbol of the totality of the cosmos, and as the representative of *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* and become a physical connection between the levels of the cosmos, the roots are in the under-world, the trunk in the middle-world and the top in the upper-world. It is the place of *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* present."¹⁰ Further Sinaga proposes "the ritual belief on *Baringin* connected to the ritual planting of the magic wand, a symbol of tree, rice in the middle world indicated comes from the underworld itself. Rice and everything in the middle world comes from *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* because he present in the three levels of world."¹¹

Worshiping the High God is not only in the terms of ritual or ceremony, but also exists in the community itself, in the form of *Adat* (customary-law). Pedersen describes that "the belief to *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* as the High God is present in the religious view ignored in any moral criterion or principle in the community, that human being have to love their neighbor, and honor your parents and you will get a long and better life, then respect to the elder man."¹²

Inculturation Methods in Christian Mission among the Batak people by Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen.

Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen was born on February 6, 1834, in Schleswig on the Island of Nordstrand Germany. The experience of being able to walk again after a serious injury in a traffic accident motivated Nommensen to become a missionary. He entered the seminary of the Rheinische Mission Society in Wuppertal-Barmen. This Mission Society later become the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). In 1861, Nommensen sailed to North Sumatera Indonesia and started his mission work among the Batak people.¹³

At that time missionaries usually taught and provided educational programs for the local people to help and support the mission work, and ultimately ordained the local people

⁹ Anicetus B. Sinaga, *The Toba-Batak High God*, 54.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 60.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² Paul B. Pedersen, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul; The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra*, 24.

¹³ Lothar Schreiner, "The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24 (April, 2000), 81.

to continue the mission work and eventually govern the Church. This process could be described as a process of indigenization. This process also facilitated the local congregation to attain self-support under the leadership of Batak leader. In the history of Christian Mission in Indonesia, the inculturation approach characteristic of the experience with the Batak people becomes a successful model of Christian Missions.

Lothar Schreiner notes that,

Ludwig I, Nommensen is a part of the history of the church in Indonesia. He – like other Western missionaries – has identified himself with the Batak people of Sumatera in unfailing dedication. His life and work in Sumatera have been of great impact. In the memory of Indonesian Christians, he lives on as the venerated “apostle of the Batak.” In Europe, the region of his origin, however, his legacy has as yet to be interpreted more widely. Nommensen, the Westerner, has lived “solidarity as a missionary principle.” Moreover, in the encounter between European and Indonesian cultures and religions, Nommensen’s ideas and the Batak Christianity contributed to a relevant partnership of the churches, and to a renewed understanding of the apostolate of the Church.¹⁴

Further, he explains that,

Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen was a true expatriate, living his entire adult life in Sumatera. He made his home among the Batak people, who after a time accepted him as one of their own and called him Apostle to the Batak people.¹⁵

Lothar Schreiner described the successfully mission methods that was conducted by Nommensen. Developed the contextual mission methods approached the Toba Batak people in order to plant and ground the Christian teaching to the Toba Batak people. Nommensen himself wellknown as the apostle to the Batak and identified himself with the Toba Batak people. Schreiner described as the result of the mission methods that was conducted by Nommensen and the Batak Christianity contributed to relevant partnership of the Churches and given or renewed understanding of the apostolate of the Church. Based on this fact, clearly we can develop such theological thinking that Christian teaching (The Word of God, Jesus Christ) not replacing or erasing the culture of the God’s people.

Nommensen’s contextual method of inculturation contextual: Translation Method and Customary law (*Adat*) Approaching

Nommensen translated Luther’s Smaller Catechism (1874) and the New Testament (1878). He organized lay leadership as soon as possible, and he used local people who helped him.¹⁶ In his mission, Nommensen approached the Batak people directly in the community and used the interaction and dialogue method to teach Christianity to the Batak

¹⁴ Lothar Schreiner, “Ludwig Nommensen Studies – A Review”, in *Journal Mission Studies*, Vol IX-2,18, 1992, 241. (Online resources).

¹⁵ Lothar Schreiner, “The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen”, 81.

¹⁶ Lothar Schreiner, “The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen”, 81.

people. Even before Nommensen sailed to Batak Island, he already knew about the Batak people and their society by reading the Rheinische Mission Society documents. He directly learned about Batak religion and culture in order to understand their culture. He realized that Batak people have a strong culture and have their own religion based on anthropology. Schreiner explains how Nommensen's knowledge of Batak culture informed his mission approach,

The anthropocentric orientation of his theology led Nommensen to evangelize the Batak people dialogically. In order to teach about baptism, he introduced instructions for baptism by posing questions about bliss, eternal life, and obedience to the triune God, rather than by starting with the creation story in Genesis and the people of Israel. His idea of an organically growing Christian life and ethos rested on unshakable trust in Christ. He led his dialogue patterns to grasp the meaning of salvation, emphasizing the second coming of Christ. He communicated his theology and method to his fellow missionaries, instructing them for their communication with the Batak people.¹⁷

Stephen B. Bevans describes that "every model of contextual theology is a model of translation. There is always a content to be adapted or accommodated to a particular culture. However, its insistence on the message of the Gospel as an unchanging message."¹⁸ Translation models can be understood a way to open communication between Christianity and the local culture (people) itself. This translation model can also be used to transform the Christianity to the local people understanding on their religion.

Robert J. Schreiter develops his theological understanding of inculturation as local theology in what has been called a translation model. According to Schreiter, "translation model are generally the first kind of model to be used in the pastoral setting, because pastoral urgency demands some kind of adaptation to local circumstances in ritual, catechesis, including the gospel into local language."¹⁹ Schreiter explains this principle more specifically,

The basic principle behind the translation model would begin with the Church tradition and adapt it to a local cultural setting. For that reason, it can be done by persons foreign to the local setting, thereby allowing for some initial missionary adaptation to the local culture. Older forms and music can be adapted to accommodate or include local custom and linguistic equivalents for the great theological categories (grace, salvation, sin, justification) can be sought in local language.²⁰

Schreiner suggests Nommensen's approach towards the Batak people who live in such a

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 30.

¹⁹ Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 7.

²⁰ Robert J. Schreiter, C.P. P.S, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 7.

well defined culture. Schreiner says that,

Nommensen saw himself confronted with twofold opposition. Apart from the old ancestor religion he sensed the influence of the devil in other things also. Nommensen placed a peculiar accent on the enemy of man by including Batak people into his teaching and preaching. In the Batak religion there was no concept of a devil, but mischievous spirits of the deceased were believed to be the enemies of the living. Nommensen confronted the Batak faith and practice more with pragmatic Christian expedience than with theological reflection. He differentiated in their beliefs elements that seemed to him to conform to the Gospel, e.g. monogamy. He defined certain elements as neutral, e.g. the laws (*adat*) pertaining to the land, such as to rice field. This differentiation of the traditional life structure made it possible for him to tolerate certain parts of the customary law and, in cooperation with the Christian chiefs, to draw up "Christian civil laws".²¹

As a missionary, Nommensen continued to uphold the principle of individual baptism. He maintained a formal relation with the highest Batak leader (Raja Sisingamangaraja XI) and he learned Batak language, especially Batak culture and custom (*adat*) from the Raja. During Nommensen's work, the traditional Batak belief praised *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*, who created this world and prepared everything for human beings. Nommensen guided and taught the Batak people that *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is God in Christianity that in Batak language named "*Debata*". From his inculturation methods we can find the first doctrine in Christian faith, how to name God. He adopted "*Debata*, Batak language", and the Batak people use it today.

In the *Adat* (customary law) that already established in the community system of Batak people, that they got from the traditional Batak belief in worshipping *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* as the High God related to what Christianity told about morality. In order to teach the Christianity especially to ground the morality or ethical aspect, Nommensen use the communication and dialogue and open the opportunity to match the similarity idea and understanding, because the basic understanding about ethical aspect itself already inside the culture. *Adat* is one of the most important aspect in the Batak culture in order to build a good community that full respect and honor one another. The methods of mission that was developed by Nommensen used the contextual mission methods, such as translation method, empowering local people and also used the local cultural adaptation in order to be able planted and grounded the Gospel and Christian teaching in the life of the Toba Batak people. In general Christian mission that was used in mission works or methods by the Western missionaries were often developed the contextual or cultural adaptation or approaching in order to be accepted by the local people.

²¹ Lothar Schreiner, *Ludwig Nommensen Studies – A Riview* (1992), 245.

Nommensen's Contextualizing Ecclesiology among the Batak people

In his mission Nommensen started to established Church as the future of the mission itself. He established the Church base on the Batak community itself. In my understanding Nommensen did a good method to start the Church base on the people (community) because the seed of the Church are the people itself. He stretched his mission to baptize and gathered the Batak people in order to build a church. Lothar Schreiner again explores Nommensen's ability to his anthropological insight, Schreiner says that "Nommensen's conception of the church reflected his anthropological emphasis and resulted in planting a truly 'people church' among the Batak."²² For example, Nommensen demonstrated human solidarity in Christ. He realized this way of life by commissioning local elder and chiefs to "gossip the Gospel" in the village. This ministry of the laity reflected Nommensen's emphasis on the congregation as the gathered people of God under the Word of God. Schreiner notes that "Nommensen practiced a contextual ecclesiology by using the customary law and structural elements of the people for the formation of a 'people's church'."²³

According to Peter C. Phan "the principal agent of inculturation is the local church, not the experts and the central authorities".²⁴ Phan quotes John Paul II:

Inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not force, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research.²⁵

My stand point is that Ecclesiology begins where the people gather and build a community with the same purpose, to hear the Good News from the missionary. People who gathered and established the community used their own language, culture and learned the Scripture and lived in that and practiced Christianity based on their own culture. The history of the Batak Christian Protestan Church (*Huria Kristen Batak Protestan*) noted that I.L. Nommensen translated Luther's Smaller Catechism (1874) and the New Testament (1878) to the Batak language. The translation being used for the worship or liturgy of the HKBP Church. This translation method made the Christian teaching was easier to be accepted and planted to the life of the Toba Batak people. Until now as one of ethnic church in Indonesia, HKBP using the Batak language in our worship and liturgy.

²² Lothar Schreiner, *The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen*, 81.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues, Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 9.

²⁵ Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues, Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, 9.

Nommensen's method of Indigenization among the Batak people

In the missionaries' work we can find the efforts of indigenization by empowering the local people while simultaneously developing the education beside the mission. The missionaries thought about how to educate the local people in order to prepare them for their future. That means that the mission work is not only to build spirituality in order to believe in God and Jesus Christ but also to better educate the local people and then the local Church can survive in a self-supporting system. In this view, we can take a picture of holistic mission, which means not only to teach the local people about Christianity but also to educate and empower them to be ready to face modernization and also globalization.

According to Peter Schineller, "the indigenization of theology means that the local community, with its own understanding and its own indigenous leadership, has the primary responsibility and task of developing the teaching, the liturgy and the practice of that local church."²⁶ Outside help may be needed at the beginning and at key stages, but the major work is done by the local Church as it develops its own identity based on its own cultural heritage and situation. Schineller says that "links with the larger church will continue to encourage the local church, and to ensure that it remains in faithful yet creative continuity with the universal Church."²⁷ The idea of indigenization in the task of inculturation brings us to understand that to be indigenous means to be a native, one who is born into a particular context or culture. We think immediately of indigenous priests or clergy, that is, those who grow up with and know the culture from inside, those who live and understand Christianity from that insider's perspective.

In Nommensen's work among the Batak people, we can find these efforts. He prepared and empowered the Batak people and provided good education. He was concerned about popular education. In 1889, he opened a formal school for the men, women, youth, and children. At the beginning of his mission Nommensen built a school in Pearaja Tarutung, North Sumatera, Indonesia (Pearaja Tarutung, North Sumatera, now the headquarter of HKBP).²⁸ He prepared local teachers who helped him to teach the people, and it is interesting that he empowered the preachers and local missionaries to become teachers at that school. He named the schools "HKBP Common School." In that time "Common School" meant that everybody could come and participate in school without payment. In this school, they taught Christianity and common education, such as science and language. Even now, in North Tapanuli, North Sumatera, we can find almost 200 schools that exist and which were built by Nommensen during his mission. This mission

²⁶ Peter Schineller, S.J, *A Handbook on Inculturation* (Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 18.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ HKBP is the short name of *Huria Kristen Batak Protestant* or Batak Christian Protestant Church, and now establish as the biggest Church in Indonesia with almost 3.5 million church members in all over the world. The headquarters of HKBP is located at Pearaja Tarutung, North Sumatera Indonesia. There are several HKBP Church was established out side Indonesia, such as in Malaysia and Singapore. In United State we can find 3 HKBP Churches in New York, California and Colorado. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) claims that HKBP is the biggest Lutheran Church in Asia.

gave a big impact to empowering the Batak people.²⁹

Nommensen also expanded his program to prepare local missionaries. In Sipaholon Pansurnapitu, North Tapanuli (1868), he opened a school for teachers and preachers and for the Batak people who were preparing to become teachers and preachers. Until now this school exists and we use it to prepare “*Church Teachers (Guru Huria, Batak Language)*”, and we call it “*Seminarium Sipaholon.*” We also use this area as the center for “*Church Synod and Conference*”. In Paraosurat Tarutung (1883) he opened a school especially for Batak people who want to become pastors, and in this school he taught the first three pastors (In July 19, 1880, Nommensen ordained the first 3 pastors from among the Batak people: Johannes Siregar, Markus Siregar and Petrus Nasution). The Pastor School opened by Nommensen grew up and then in 1957 was moved to Pematangsiantar, where it became “HKBP Theological Seminary.”

Interaction between Christian Mission and the Batak Culture; an Interaction between Christianity and Culture

Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, and called the apostles and disciples to continue that work after his own death and resurrection. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). The Church has attempted to carry out this missionary mandate to share the good news throughout the world. T.J. Gorringer argues that “the idea of inculturation draws partly on the theology of the second century Apologists, but chiefly on the logic of incarnation. The Apologists discerned a ‘seed of the Word’ in all human cultures.”³⁰

Christian faith is contextual. Existence and expression are always within a particular framework of human values and experiences. The Christian message will always be interpreted, presented, received or rejected in reference to the existing cultural frameworks. C. S. Song argues that “Jesus always dealt with culture in its concrete manifestation in human community, in belief systems, morals, laws, customs. In other words, he calls this reality ‘the grammar of culture’.”³¹ Then, Song argues that “in the case with language, it is also the case of culture. If the rule is that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law custom.”³² It is essential for us Christians to know that there is this theological dimension to culture, any culture, Christian or not. No culture can be affirmed or rejected in its entirety because Jesus was never for or against a culture as culture. Jesus presents himself as transformer of culture. Jesus could not then be

²⁹ The significant inspiration from the Nommensen’s mission work is the holistic mission, when the spirituality (Christianization), education and healthy care become one package (body). In several locations we can find the fact that HKBP’s Church was built in the same location with School and Hospital.

³⁰ T.J. Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity; A Theology of Culture* (Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 200.

³¹ C.S. Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 142.

³² *Ibid*, 142.

dealing with a culture in abstraction but with certain concrete expressions of a culture.

Based on this understanding, I argue that the process of inculturation by transforming the power of the Gospel not only converts other cultures become a Christian teaching but it needs to be opened up to other cultures in order to attain fullness of meaning. Gospel is the ground of all creation whatever truth, goodness and beauty derive from it. In fact, the Gospel interacts with each specific cultural context in creative ways. The Gospel can also critiques the elements of each culture, taking an uncompromising stand on issue of liberation, justice and human dignity, and promising fullness of life in Christ for all. Sometimes cultures and traditions are used to overcome or exploit particular sections of society in the name of order and harmony.

Inculturation, indigenization, and contextualization are distinct and related concepts. Because they are related and because they point to dynamic cultural and social phenomena, they are often use synonymously. According to Ruy Costa, "inculturation, indigenization and contextualization are evangelistic-apologetic concepts; inculturation and indigenization are apologetic methods focused on the translation / interpretation of a received text for a given culture."³³

In dialectical process between Christianity and Batak culture in the pre-Christianity, we can find the dialectical process between Christianity with the *Adat* (customary law). Taking this into account, I am thinking about the process in the time when Nommensen dialogued with or taught the Christian ethic to the Batak people and met with the *Adat* that Batak people have. For example: I am thinking about when Nommensen taught the Ten Commandments especially the fifth Commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord, thy God given thee' in Batak language *Ingkon pasangaphonmu natorasmu, asa martua ho jala leleng mangolu di tano na nilehon in Debata di hamu*. The idea or meaning of this Christian teaching already exists inside the traditional Batak belief or culture itself in the form of *Adat* (customary law) and the Batak people have to respect and obey the law in order to worship *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*. Another example, that we can pay attention to, is in the teaching of love. Christianity teaches 'love your neighbor as yourself', in Batak *Haholongi ma dongan mu jolma dohot hombarmu songon ho tu dirim*. This idea already exists inside the traditional Batak belie in the form of *Adat*, and the Batak people keep this law strongly, as they do to worship and obey the law of *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*. Lothar Schreiner wrote his book in the Indonesia language. In this book he describes that "the matching between Christianity and *Adat* in Batak Island is in the form of mutual dialogue and completely each other, and the Christianity bring it to the Light of Chirst."³⁴

³³ Ruy O. Costa, *One Faith, Many Cultures; Inculturation, Indigenization, and Contextualization* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1988), ix-xii.

³⁴ Lothar Schreiner, *Telah Kudengar dari Ayahku; Perjumpaan Adat dengan Iman Kristen di Tanah Batak 'I have heart from my father; The Matching between Adat (customary law) and the Christian faith in the Batak Island'* (Jakarta: BPK- Gunung Mulia, 1978), 161-162.

According to Peter C. Phan, "...the result of inculturation is both the transformation of the culture from within by the gospel and the enrichment of the gospel by the culture with its new ways of understanding and living it."³⁵ Deeply, Phan describes that "...the end result of inculturation is something new, a *tertium quid*, going beyond the current culture and the previous ways of understanding and living the gospel."³⁶ This fact deeply make sense and helps us to understand that the seed of religion already exists in the culture or in the traditional belief in the pre-Christianity in the life of Batak people in North Sumatera, Indonesia.

Exploring inculturation, Aylward Shorter notes that "Inculturation is a term that denotes the presentation and re-expression of the Gospel in forms and terms proper to a culture, a process which results in the reinterpretation of both, without being unfaithful to either."³⁷ Shorter adds that "it is a process of a deep, sympathetic adaptation to, and appropriation of, a local culture in which the church finds itself, in a way that does not compromise its basic faith."³⁸ By using this explanation I can understand that inculturation is a process by which a particular people respond to the saving Word of God and express their response in their own cultural forms of worship, reflection, organization and life. This is how a local church is born and continues to live.

4. Conclusion

By examining *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* in the traditional belief of the Toba Batak people, this research proved that in the traditional Batak belief (Pre-Christianity) the seed of religion existed in the ritual and understanding *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*. The cult of *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* existed and impacted the cultural system that was established by the traditional belief. As mission work finding the way to plan and ground the teaching of Christianity, these existences help the mission work and method to approach the Batak people. This research described how the missionary worked and taught the Toba Batak people by using contextual mission works. Ingwar Ludwid Nommensen wellknown as the apostle to the Toba Batak people used the contextual mission method to approach the Toba Batak people. As the result mostly the Toba Batak people shifted their belief to the Christian teaching and became Christian.

Consciously and unconsciously Christianity has been contextualized to be meaningful to the people in cultures to which the Christian message spread, in which the Church developed, and from which it sends out its cross-cultural missionaries. The missionary's task and the task of the Church that grows out of their work is to interpret and de-contextualize the biblical message to limit the intrusion of materials growing out of their own culture. They then must contextualize the message to communicate it effectively

³⁵ Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues, Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, 6.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Aylward Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture* (New York: Goeffrey Chapman Press, 1994), 32.

³⁸ Aylward Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, 32.

Pintor Marihot Sitanggang: Examining *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* in the Traditional Belief of Toba Batak People to respondents in the target culture.

References

- Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Costa, Ruy O. *One Faith, Many Cultures; Inculturation, Indigenization, and Contextualization*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1988.
- Gorringer, T.J. *Furthering Humanity; A Theology of Culture*, Burlington. USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004.
- Lumbantobing, Philip O. *The Structure of The Toba-Batak Belief in The High God*. Amsterdam: Jacob Van Campen Press, 1963.
- Pedersen, Paul B. *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul; The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970.
- Phan, Peter C. *In Our Own Tongues, Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Schineller, Peter S.J. *A Handbook on Inculturation*. Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 1990.
- Schreiner, Lothar. "The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen". *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, April, 2000.
- Schreiner, Lothar. "Ludwig Nommensen Studies – A Review", in *Journal Mission Studies*, Vol IX-2,18, 1992.
- Schreiner, Lothar. *Telah Kudengar dari Ayahku; Perjumpaan Adat dengan Iman Kristen di Tanah Batak 'I have heart from my father; The Matching between Adat (customary law) and the Christian faith in the Batak Island'*, Jakarta, Indonesia: BPK- Gunung Mulia, 1978.
- Schreier, Robert J. *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985.
- Shorter, Aylward. *Evangelization and Culture*. New York: Geoffrey Chapman Press, 1994.
- Sinaga, Anicetus B. *The Toba-Batak High God; Transcendence and Immanence*. West Germany: Anthropos Institute, 1981.
- Song, C.S. *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.